DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 322 708 FL 018 614

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TITLE "Pre-Language" and Foreign Language Mini-Courses.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 41p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communicative Competence (Languages); *Course Descriptions; Course Objectives; *Minicourses; *Second Language Instruction; *Second Language Learning; *Speech Skills; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS Spontaneous Speech

ABSTRACT

An examination is made of a foreign language teaching concept called pre-language that attempts to help foreign language students increase their speaking confidence and speaking abilities in the new language. The teaching method is designed for four distinct environments, including: (1) an independent mini-course for tourists or emergency needs; (2) a multi-language exploratory course to expose students to various languages and improve their language ability; (3) a pre-course for use before regular academic study; and (4) as an initial unit in full sequences of up to several semesters in which the methodology is followed up consistently. Discussions of the teaching concept address how mini-courses can help in speaking spontaneity and creativity, what the goals and implementations of the various courses are and why they are important, and some limitations inherent in current foreign language instruction. Additionally, the question of how to integrate the mini-course into the classroom is addressed, and its stages of instruction are described. Finally, an assessment of the results of mini-course instruction, including the follow-up process, is provided based on the outcomes of several hundred students who have taken the course in one or more of the environments mentioned. (GLR)

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'Pre-Language' and Foreign Language Mini-Courses

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A. an initial teaching method

'Pre-Language' is my innovative initial method for foreign language teaching. The goal of the method is to provide speaking confidence, and modest but creative speaking abilities: the ability to speak in original sentences and discourses, including asking and answering simple questions. The method is implemented primarily in 'Mini-Courses': units of several weeks used as the initial stages of study. ('Pre-Language' more specifically names the initial language structure taught in the first half of the Mini-Courses.)

The method is most urgently needed in courses that, for any reason, do not achieve speaking goals for most of their students. This most obviously includes courses that focus on grammar or reading. But it also includes courses with speaking goals that, as they are actually taught, happen not to achieve spontaneous and creative speaking abilities for many students, for any reason, methodological or administrative. (Even "conversation" courses often don't actually teach conversational abilities.)

It was traditionally assumed that speaking could only be acquired after two or more years of grammar curriculum. The more modern tendency is to move speaking so that it is more and more simultaneous with other study. The radical assumption behind 'Pre-Language' is that speaking confidence along with basic speaking ability should — for both theoretical and practical reasons — be acquired as the very first step: Students should acquire actual creative speaking ability with a small vocabulary and limited grammar, as their first step, since there are major obstacles to acquisition of speaking abilities later.

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The method was first designed for relatively "exotic" languages (Hebrew, Arabic, Japanese, Chinese, Russian, Greek), but has been found useful in more familiar ones as well (German, French, Spanish, Italian). I have by now written, taught, and revised Mini-Courses in these languages, and more recently for several minor languages.

The Mini-Courses vary in length. The newest versions are as short as 10 or so class-hours — as little as two weeks of a college course. They do not satisfy all possible skill goals and other goals; on the contrary, they are specifically aimed at a deliberately restricted range of speaking ability in an independent initial curricular unit.

These Mini-Courses have been designed for, and used in, four distinct environments:

(1) as **independent Mini-Courses,** e.g. for tourists, or emergency needs, such as military or medical;
(2) in **multi-language 'exploratory' courses,** to expose students to various languages, and improve their language-learning abilities;
(3) as **Pre-Courses** before regular academic study;
(4) as the initial unit in full sequences of up to several semesters, in which the methodology is followed up consistently.

'Pre-Language' has been used in a few instances by tourists, and has been cited for its military application (see Groesbeck); my multi-language exploratory course has been given regularly at college level, and occasionally elsewhere, including a remedial 8th-grade class; Pre-Courses using the method have been given in Spanish, German, Japanese, and other languages, by me and other teachers; and I give a full sequence using the method in Hebrew (with Arabic planned after a trial run).

In all four applications, the Mini-Course itself consists of two stages: the first, 'Pre-Language' stage; and the second, 'Transition' stage, to achieve speaking abilities within a 'Sheltered' version of the language. The articulation of these two stages constitutes a novel solution to some traditional and pervasive curricular problems.

These problems all relate to the place of linguistic structure — 'grammar' in the broadest sense — in foreign-language curriculum. The proposed method, as expressed in the two-stage initial curriculum, constitutes a highly specific attack on the problem of grammar.

My goal, as can be seen, has not been to investigate theoretical aspects of acquisition, but rather to contribute to practical foreign-language teaching. My efforts in this regard began with a special invention to facilitate the acquisition of elementary reading skills in Hebrew and other languages (see Bar-Lev), but it is clear that speaking is, in crucial ways, the most important language skill, and a key to all others.

B. initial definition of the problem

1. the difficulty of speaking

It should be no secret that speaking remains a problem in many foreign-language teaching environments. Especially in the more "exotic" languages, such as Russian or Hebrew, one finds advanced students, even teaching assistants, who cannot speak confidently and 'fluidly.' (By 'fluidity,' I mean simply continuous speech, with no necessary implications of native-like quality, speed, or range. This is the usage of the term 'fluency' implied with ACTFL proficiency goals, as can be seen in James, appendix, and by Brumfit. See further below.)

In many programs, even in the more familiar languages, the average high-school teacher cannot take the time apparently needed to teach speaking, if only for fear that the students will be underprepared for the grammatical requirements that will inevitably catch up with them in later courses. In college environments, considerations of academic freedom militate in favor of a grammatical bias. Even proficiency-oriented and communicative programs with multiple sections tend to have common grammar exams, and often leave teaching in the hands of literature majors who may not have great interest in the nitty-gritty of speaking.

To put the problem starkly, I suggest that many foreign-language courses (at least in the real world, including junior high and high schools) are actually grammar courses: Sample discourses may be conversations, but the activities given in class and for homework are predominantly focused on grammar, or at least the activities, however communicative in their structure, are carried out in slow motion, with any needed corrections along the way, so that their communicative intent is (I believe) fatally compromised.

The big gap is surely between what is known in theory and what is practiced in the ordinary classroom. Yet one might even ask whether the curricular problem really is solved, even in theory. <u>If</u> we assume that all students end up with a satisfactory speaking ability after six months at the Defense Language Institute, we should note that six months of full days translate into over 5 years of study at an ordinary college pace — or ten years of high school! It is also worth asking how much of the success of the DLI depends on student motivation and other circumstances that cannot be duplicated elsewhere.

One might even wonder whether the general attempt to achieve 'proficiency' or 'communicative competence' does not simply add new speaking goals to an already crowded grammar schedule without effective means to cut back on the grammar part: Doesn't the need to contextualize grammar or pay attention to

sociolinguistic context simply take more time? A more radical reconfiguration of goals would seem to be needed. A 'whole-language' approach, with full achievement of grammar knowledge, proficiency, communicative competence, and satisfying speaking abilities may not fit into an undergraduate major, much less a high-school language requirement. And given this, is it not appropriate to ask what quantities of each can reasonably be expected? Otherwise, overburdened teachers may continue to emphasize that which is most easily tested: grammar knowledge.

The innovations to be described here are aimed at real environments, including high-school programs that may be very far removed from the latest advances in pedagogical theory, and teachers who, for one or another reason, may even use terms like 'proficiency' and even 'communicative competence' in effect as code-terms for defending a traditional grammar curriculum in which many or most students will not in fact acquire any speaking skills at all. The purpose of the proposed innovation is to provide an initial curricular unit that is so convenient, portable, and automatic in its use that it can provide initial speaking abilities even in such environments. And the purpose of my discussion here is to address issues of concern to such teachers, as well as teachers with a more skills-oriented approach, and in preference to theoreticians of language acquisition.

2. the limitation of sample dialogues

As can be seen in virtually all modern textbooks, the sample dialogue is still a main tool for the teaching of speaking: It provides linguistic elements in contexts with a communicative purpose, and thus seems to satisfy both structural and motivational needs of teaching. But if the dialogue is memorized, it is boring and provides only limited abilities: Students later learn, to their dismay, that native speakers seem to have (as they often put it) "studied from a different

book." But the specific dialogue is hard to break out of, once it is memorized. And if it is not memorized, it cannot provide the immediate communicative power: There is a danger that students will not acquire even the immediate abilities, and that the curriculum will lapse into slow-motion activities.

A central point is that decomposing memorized dialogues in order to move to creative abilities simply does not work well. Pre-Language as a method departs from the dialogue strategy of most modern teaching methods, and emphasizes the individual building-blocks — individual words — from the beginning; sample contexts are provided, but mainly the words are so selected as to push quickly beyond the sample conversations. Similarly, since the method aims at immediate speaking, it contradicts widely-held current assumptions about the primacy of 'input,' and the permissibility of a Silent Period preceding student initiation of speech. The latter point, especially, will be discussed briefly below, but it is worth noting from the beginning that these methodological innovations follow fairly directly from the assumed goal of immediate speaking.

It is assumed here that an initial speaking ability will give students the ability to comprehend dialogues more easily and more deeply, both in content and structure, and thus ultimately allow them to integrate relevant elements of dialogues into an already established creative speaking ability. Similarly, this initial speaking ability can give students the ability to comprehend input at a higher level, and similarly integrate relevant elements from it.

3. spontaneity and creativity

The broader implications of the method relate to the teaching of speaking-skills in relation to grammar. In a significant sense, as noted, traditional courses, and even many modern courses, are grammar courses.

Traditionally the goal was to teach grammar, "sharpening one's tools" in the hope of using them subsequently, immediate skills acquisition being deemed impossible. Higgs outlines a modern version of the "tool-sharpening" approach, proposing that there is indeed a purpose to learn grammar in the classroom that one cannot immediately use. Hammond shows how Higgs' modern version of the traditional approach is not, in fact, justified by experience or research. While the argument will no doubt continue, the position taken here is that speaking abilities need to be taught immediately and decisively, more at the beginning rather than less.

Although some traditionalists regard a speaking-oriented approach (or even a skills-oriented approach generally) as "narrow," it is my suggestion that the traditional grammar course is in fact narrow, and that only a course that provides actually speaking abilities can be regarded as a "language" course in the full sense. Reading in the language and even translating into it are such slow skills that they too must be considered less than adequate preparation for active use of the language in real situations: They are applications of grammar, as distinct from ordinary language use.

Role-playing within a preassigned topic with preparation-time allowed is also not actual use of language. And even free conversation without preparation, if punctuated by corrections, or if unrealistically large amounts of thinking time are allowed, is counter-productive, encouraging bad habits of hesitation and dependence: For all the traditional worries of 'fossilization' of specific phonetic or grammatical errors, there is insufficient worry about the fossilization of habits of hesitation and vacillation, or simply of 'metalinguistic' comment (talk about language) and dependence upon native speakers.

The proposed Pre-Courses are not actually replacements for traditional curriculum, or loosenings of traditional standards, but rather additions, inserted

at the beginning: It would not be fair to accuse them of greater laxness than traditional courses since traditional courses simply do not teach spontaneous speaking. (Even many modern courses do not teach a high degree of spontaneity.) Obviously less grammatical accuracy can be expected in spontaneous speech: This is essentially what 'spontaneous' means, even for native speakers.

On the other hand, it is certainly a goal of the Mini-Courses to enhance the quality of spontaneous speech in all possible ways within their limited time. In any case, hesitations, vacillations, insertions, and pausing are more or less banished (with practice), and grammatical accuracy is certainly one goal, although along with others. I would be happy to compare my students' productions with the productions of students in other methods, if the degree of spontaneity can be kept constant: It wouldn't be fair to compare my students, as they respond to questions that they have never heard, and even using words that they do not know, or making up original stories of their own, with memorized conversations or prepared skits of other students.

C. goals of the various implementations

1. independent Mini-Courses

Although independent Mini-Courses are perhaps of least professional interest to academic foreign-language teachers, it is easiest to begin by considering these courses, many of which are readily available in popular bookstores: Foreign-language teachers can easily imagine themselves about to take a tourist trip to a country whose language they do not know, and see how much practical knowledge they can acquire with the small books available. Attempts with Greek or Russian are especially relevant if you are a Spanish or French teacher: Because of the structure of these languages, your reaction to

Greek or Russian will parallel your students' reaction to French or Spanish. (Unfortunately, the only instance I know of to expose teachers to a new foreign language in a teacher-training program taught Portuguese to Spanish-teachers, which must inevitably have had the effect of confirming them in their preconceptions, in view of the relatively small differences between these languages.)

One quickly finds, I suggest, that most of the available books are all but unusable. Typically, phrase-books provide ready-made sentences that are too long and complex to learn in a useful quantity. If there is a grammatical review, it is generally much too difficult to acquire in any sense whatsoever. While these books often contain very useful vocabularies for the more advanced student, the amount of information in them that could be learned and used by the absolute beginner is minute: a handful out of the hundreds of sentences, and a handful out of the hundreds of words.

While, as noted, the need for such independent Mini-Courses may not be appreciated by the teacher who is attempting to move students in groups of 30 or 40 through courses of study of several years length, they typify the inaccessibility of information about language which, as I will suggest, often confronts the beginner in any framework.

The proposed Mini-Courses are intended to provide usable abilities in minimum time: They can be used by tourists lacking the time and academic ability for full courses. There is also a medical and military need: One need only think of the doctors assisting Armenian earth-quake victims. Of course any such specific need requires specialized vocabulary: Even tourists may have highly specialized needs, from medicine to car repairs. The goal of the Mini-Courses is simply to provide the matrix of the language (not only general vocabulary, but also the

sentence structures, pronunciation, main grammatical inflection) necessary to use the specific vocabulary effectively.

In other words, a Mini-Course would not provide the specialized part of the vocabulary needed for tourist or emergency needs, but it does provide the abilities that might allow learners to use the specialized vocabulary, and to comprehend sentences, making use of structural elements in them. Thus, the Mini-Course can be seen to provide a key that might make the available tourist books actually usable.

2. the need for exploratory courses

Foreign-language teachers often resent having to learn even small samples in new foreign languages — although they should rejoice in the experience: Only by learning a new foreign language can they in any way know what their students experience, as noted above. In any case, is it any wonder, in this general context, that our students are so limited in their foreign-language interest? (See Simon.) We might formulate a "Golden Rule" for language teachers: Don't expect your students to be interested in a new language if you are not interested in a new language.

As exploratory courses, the Mini-Courses expose students to languages that they might otherwise be unable to study, as well as languages that they might subsequently study. Their intent is not to prepare students directly for subsequent courses, but rather to provide as much independent skill as possible, especially in speaking.

Both teachers and students are in need of a greater variety in foreign-language study. The existing 'menus' of languages need to be expanded. The foreign-language capabilities of Americans need to be broadened from the very

bottom, e.g. where a high-school student could study a variety of Western and Eastern European, Middle Eastern, and Far Eastern languages. Obviously neither the time nor the staffing is available to supply these languages in existing frameworks. But an exploratory course offering a choice of languages, so that average students could study two or three languages to some modest level, apart from their regular single language of study, could have wonderful effects on attitudes and abilities. Of course, the methodology of such a course must be sufficiently powerful to provide satisfying abilities in the exploratory course itself — and it is not in itself obvious that a half-semester or semester could provide such abilities, given how much is currently accomplished in ordinary courses.

To expand course offerings, as envisaged here, obviously requires curricula that are self-teaching to an extent that even the tourist books are not: Perhaps the strangest, and in any case a characteristic, feature of the proposed Mini-Courses is that the teacher (if any) does not even have to know the language.

3. the need for 'Pre-Courses' in speaking

In the third environment, as Pre-Courses, the Mini-Courses are intended to provide students with an initial range of skills, which they might not acquire in the subsequent, ordinary curriculum. The goal here is to revolutionize even traditional courses from inside by providing students with early skills of speaking and acquisition that could serve as a backdrop to motivate and guide subsequent study, and even as a benchmark for subsequent curriculum.

The Pre-Courses constitute an added module of spontaneous speaking, inserted at the beginning of existing curriculum: The goal is not only to add a new

skill, quite different from the planned speaking and grammatical activities of many courses, but also to teach this skill itself as effectively as possible.

It is my suggestion that Pre-Courses in speaking are needed in ordinary curriculum, at least in the more "exotic" languages. The litmus test for whether a given course needs a Pre-Course in speaking is whether the majority of students can speak spontaneously during the first semester. If not, wouldn't two weeks be a worthwhile sacrifice if they could provide confident speaking abilities, while introducing some part of the vocabulary and grammar that will occur later in the semester anyway?

Pre-units with partly similar intent have been tried in several modern textbooks, such as Higgs et al.'s Spanish, Sevin et al.'s German, and Clark's Russian — but, except for the classroom expressions and daily greetings in Higgs et al., it is not even clear whether these pre-units really aim at speaking as such, rather than improving performance on the more conventional goals of the rest of the textbook. Certainly none of these pre-units seems specially intended to create independent spontaneous and creative speaking abilities. (For example, Sevin et al.'s advice to the instructor says that it is enough for students to be able to read aloud the sample dialogues fluently.)

Furthermore, the existing textbooks are not at all State-of-the-Art in more "exotic" languages. For example, in Hebrew, the choice is generally between "Audio-Lingual/Cognitive" textbooks (i.e. Audio-Lingual Method plus grammar explanations) and Grammar-Translation textbooks — and the need to teach broader reading skills often militates in favor of the latter.

Thus, I suggest that there is indeed often a need for a Pre-Course to start the student out on the right foot. Obviously the Pre-Course must be distinctive if it is to achieve these goals: It must somehow achieve speaking goals so automatically that it does not depend on a teacher being trained in teaching

speaking goals, and it must at least to this extent depart from current approaches and methods, in order to leap-frog the administrative as well as methodological limitations noted earlier.

The Pre-Courses are not intended to mesh comfortably with the subsequent regular textbook. Teachers who are already satisfied with their students' speaking abilities (or whose goal is to teach the current textbook comfortably and go home) will obviously have no patience for the Pre-Courses. But programs interested in achieving speaking goals without long teacher training programs and administrative restructuring might find them useful.

4. full curriculum.

The long range goals of the method are most easily implemented, of course, in full curriculum. The goal of a full curriculum using the method would be to follow out the speaking goal completely, integrating other materials into the goals of the Mini-Course, and utilizing further the specific techniques developed within it. I have had the opportunity to develop the longest such full course in Hebrew, to the extent that ordinary textbooks could be by-passed altogether. (But see further discussion below.) Of course, the central question is: What would be the structure of a course that followed out a radically speaking-based method through several years of study?

D. the theoretical problem

1. interlanguage vs. the classroom

The essential problem that must be faced in developing Mini-Courses with the above goals is how to reconcile the psychological limitations of the learner with the demands of the classroom.

Most classrooms ignore the limitations on acquisition, and teach what seems to be demanded by the language itself: Whatever phonemes it has, whatever tenses and genders and other inflectional categories, they are taught in systematic order, or at least as they naturally occur in typical discourses. Assuming that there is a contrast between 'learning' and 'acquisition' (see Krashen & Terrell), these classrooms are inevitably addressing only learning — a position similar to Higgs', which I have decided not to follow here.

The psychological limitations of learners are such as to limit them to acquiring a simplified form of language in early stages of study: an 'interlanguage' — like a pidgin variety of the language, or some early stage of child language, such as the 'telegraphic' stage, in which all grammatical elements are omitted. (On interlanguage, see Selinker; on pidgins and telegraphic stage, see Fromkin & Rodman.)

But most language teachers would not consider acquisition of an interlanguage an acceptable classroom goal: Errors may of course occur (since students are not perfect), but the ordinary classroom teacher is likely to consider the goal of <u>preventing</u> interlanguage more appropriate than encouraging it. Very few teachers and only some students would be satisfied with a proposal to teach interlanguage intentionally: While some teachers are tolerant of deviations, the majority of them cannot ever be expected to be so tolerant as to embrace interlanguage as a teaching goal, and the teacherly itch to turn mere speaking into proficiency must, it seems, be scratched — even if spontaneous speaking abilities are destroyed in the process.

Is it possible to resolve this contradiction between psychological limits of the acquirer, and the demands of the ordinary classroom? The contradiction would seem to favor the traditional view, in which the elementary classroom teaches 'learning,' and 'acquisition' is simply deferred till later.

2. a solution: 'Pre-Language'

The proposed method uses a special sequencing of curricular elements, which fits the psychological realities of language acquisition and communicative goals into the demands of the classroom: Students first learn to speak in original sentences and discourses within a special selection of the target language, called the 'Pre-Language' — a fully grammatical but restricted selection of the language.

There are therefore no grammatical decisions within the Pre-Language; e.g. all nouns are of a single gender, and only a single present tense verb-form is taught. But there is no necessary ungrammaticality within the Pre-Language, since it is possible to speak grammatically within a single gender as long as nouns of the other gender(s) have been excluded from the learner's vocabulary. In many Western languages, because of personal conjugation, full conversational interaction is not possible, but many highly communicative conversations are possible (e.g. including "Bread, please!"; "How much does it cost?"; "You're speaking fast!"), and even simple 'stories' that develop memory and creativity in the language, and get the student used to maintaining conversational control, which will be vital in full conversation.

Thus the Pre-Language has the grammatical simplicity of a 'pidgin' or the 'telegraphic' stage of first language acquisition (see Fromkin & Rodman on both), but without the deviance typical of these special forms of language: Structural simplicity is achieved by selection rather than modification of the language. They thus achieve the psychological benefits of 'interlanguage' without its deviance.

It is important to emphasize this difference between 'Pre-Language' in this sense and 'interlanguage,' pidgins, etc.: Pre-Language is, in effect, a device to "smuggle" the language in grammatical form "under" the acquirer's psychological limitations. Fully accurate speech is in fact possible at this point: Students actually speak grammatically in original sentences and discourses even at this

early point to the extent that they acquire the material taught — and this material is far simpler than that presented in ordinary courses.

They may innovate into areas of ungrammaticality, e.g. by combining 'potato' and 'soup' into an ungrammatical *'potato soup.' While, as teacher, I may or may not mention the ungrammaticality of the novel combination (depending on the student), I am not totally unhappy about the innovation. But where students make errors in terms of what they have learned, I have no compunctions about mentioning the error and practicing the correct form — as long as I do it afterwards, and do not interrupt their speaking.

Within the 'Pre-Language,' learners acquire the ability to speak in original sentences, asking and answering simple sentences, and even telling simple stories. They are energetically taught to spend a second or two planning each sentence, and then say the whole sentence from beginning to end. They are taught never to self-correct for grammar or pronunciation (as long as it is within a comprehensible range), and never to insert sounds or English words, never to roll their eyes or scratch their heads, at least within sentences.

They continue to practice (and be tested in) their ability to speak volubly and imaginatively, as well as continuously. They are praised for thinking of original ways to express ideas, as well as for the interesting ideas themselves; thus they learn their limits by practical experience, but also learn to expand their limits continually. (Speaking tests are supplemented by rapid-writing tests, which I find offer a helpful simulation of speaking.)

3. transition into 'Sheltered Language'

The second stage of each Mini-Course is where grammatical complexity is first introduced, so that the challenge of grammar is first confronted in this second stage, a week or so into the Mini-Course.

This stage includes grammatical detail, up to a communicative, "Sheltered" version of the language, including all genders, and main forms of the present tense ('I', 'you' polite, 'he', 'she', and 'they' forms) and the infinitive. (The plural is included marginally.) This is not a wide grammatical range, but my belief is that most existing students would do very much better than at present, in terms of their own satisfaction as well as practical uses of the language, if they could master just this much grammar actively, in truly spontaneous speech, even after a year or more of study.

Teaching of even this much grammar in such a short time, however, is not a simple matter either: We are still faced with the basic problem of grammar, albeit on a relatively small scale. The goal is to preserve the confidence and enjoyment of speaking from the easier Pre-Language stage as grammatical detail is slowly blended in.

The Transition stage, while committed to the introduction of structural 'contrasts' such as inflectional categories (gender, person), is based on a novel approach to these contrasts. In a broad way, I see contrasts as the major challenge in acquiring a fuller form of the language. Thus, having begun with a single personal form of the verb, I follow this up by introducing the additional several forms one at a time. In Spanish, where multiple 1st-person endings are involved (**-o** and **-oy**), they are introduced separately. The second gender in a language is typically introduced separately for animates and inanimates.

The upshot is that all contrasts are introduced 'asymmetrically': Where the typical textbook introduces gender when nouns are first taught, the Mini-Courses

defer discussion of gender until some 20–30 nouns have already been used in a variety of original sentences (and introduces only one gender or less at a time). I suggest that the ordinary course teaches students to hesitate and perform a mid-sentence calculation; the Mini-Courses teach continuous as well as imaginative speech.

The demand of continuous and imaginative speech is maintained, in spite of the new challenge of grammatical inflection. Here the students and teacher must decide the importance of accuracy for their needs. It is possible for a perfectionist teacher to spend more time on individual categories to ensure accuracy: At most this means a few additional half-hours reviewing the grammatical exercises given, between communicative activities. (But interruption of speaking is still forbidden, and occasional mistakes, whether overgeneralizations or slips, are inevitable.)

In my process of curricular revision, I have found that slight 'tinkering' with the exercises or even the sequencing of whole categories or individual items brings noticeable improvement with subsequent groups: Where comprehensibility was the only goal a few years ago, I find that each revision has brought greater success with the specific inflectional difficulties.

Grammatical perfection is not aimed at in the Mini-Course: The goal is not to banish either overgeneralizations or slips, since the price for such banishment is loss of the very confidence that the Mini-Course attempts to teach. Instead, keeping the overgeneralizations and mistakes within a range that can be expected to contribute to further acquisition of more of the language is the goal, not of teacher correction, but of curricular revision.

As noted, a basic grammatical range is taught — one that would adequately serve communicative needs and even allow abstract discussion. The worst mistakes in Western European languages, for example, for anyone who masters

just the 'Sheltered grammar' of the Mini-Course would consist of never using the familiar 'you' or the past tense; as noted, if students could use just this much grammar in truly spontaneous speech, I suggest that this would be a net gain for many courses. And of course there is nothing to prevent students from incorporating additional grammar into their speech in subsequent study, to the extent that this is actually possible.

E. interim results

1. assessment

A few hundred students have been through one or another Mini-Course in one of the four environments. Controlled experiments has been difficult to organize for several reasons, so the evidence to be summarized is purely anecdotal. But perhaps this number of individual cases is sufficiently persuasive to merit broader discussion of the methodological directions that have emerged in the program.

How can we assess the results in speaking ability? Use of an oral proficiency interview (as described in James) would be complex, not only because of the time it would take, but also because the speaking skills taught do not conform to the sequence of skills implied by ACTFL proficiency goals: Mini-Course students do not know the lists typical of Novice level, but they have syntactic abilities that are more characteristic of Intermediate level. For example, they may not know how to say '13' (except by guessing '10' followed by '3'), but they can typically respond to straightforward questions, including those involving person-switch ("Do you ...?" "Yes, I ..."), and produce original discourses (whether extended answers or independent stories) many sentences long.

Even a remedial 8th-grade class was able, without exception, to ask and answer simple questions and produce spontaneous stories 3-4 sentences long after 4-5 classroom hours in each of 3 languages (Italian, Greek, and Cantonese) taught for about 8 half-hours each; college students typically reach open-ended abilities (the ability to create lengthy answers and tell stories of any length desired) within 10 or so class-hours). Their speech rate is about 30 words per minute — perhaps a quarter of the native rate, but nevertheless continuous.

In any of the four environments, the Mini-Courses thus provide the ability to speak comprehensibly and continuously in whole, original sentences and discourses, including answering simple questions — along with the positive attitude towards language study that naturally comes with such success. A high degree of spontaneity in speech can be demanded from the very beginning: not only the ability to respond instantly, but also not to be frightened by words and even topics that go beyond learned material.

The results in practical speaking ability have sometimes been estimated informally as several times those possible within existing approaches; on a few occasions, some experienced observers have informally estimated students' speaking ability of a student as typical of third-year college level even after just a few weeks of a Mini-Course — although a closer observation of the limited vocabulary and patterns used often reveals its more limited basis. (The observation probably comes from the fact that, in many college courses, open-ended spontaneous speech is not demanded until the third year.) And of course there are gaps in their knowledge: They do not know months or days of the week, numbers from 13 to 19, etc.

The only exceptions to the positive picture have been notably special: a few students who could not overcome their inhibitions towards tape-recorders or speaking in front of the class; some students who could never overcome

inhibitions learned in previous study of a given language. (While I have used the Mini-Courses and the techniques in them also with inhibited advanced students, they have not exhibited the same exceptionless success with such students: While less than 5% of the students failed to overcome inhibitions in a Mini-Course with a new language, some 30-40% failed to overcome them completely in a language that they have studied previously, even if in a modern program. Those who have studied the language previously, for example, are more likely to lapse into vacillation than newcomers, if suddenly confronted by a new communicative challenge — like ex-smokers who are more likely to take a cigarette under pressure.)

It is obvious to all students and teachers who have participated in or observed the program that the student's abilities are simply more confident over a wider range, more productive, and creative than those of the student who has memorized fixed sentences in dialogues. While the results are not all-encompassing in a way that promises to replace existing curricula (for example, the Mini-Courses in themselves do not provide very high comprehension skills), they do seem sufficiently powerful to merit incorporation in a larger curriculum in some form, and meanwhile at least to merit a broader audience.

Visits of fluent speakers, which I have begun to institute, are instructive. The biggest problem is psychological: Students must learn not to just wait for the visitor to take control, but rather to take control in the conversation. In the former case, they sound and feel like dull-witted children; in the latter case, they converse confidently and enjoyably, even after two or three weeks of study. (Games like 20 Questions practice the needed control: The visitor may decide to be, e.g., an apple, and students must guess this by asking questions, first yes/no questions, then wh-questions. This is the essential model provided for how to ask e.g. directions: Don't ask "Where is ...?" — which is likely to elicit an answer

incomprehensible to any non-native speaker, but rather "Is it to the right? Do I get there by bus? Which bus?")

Although, as noted, the original goal was not grammatical accuracy, command of inflectional categories has increased radically with curricular revision of the 'Transition' stage. Quite general success with some extremely difficult linguistic structures (e.g. over 80% accuracy with the conjugational prefixes of Arabic, or Russian present-tense conjugation, not to mention the much easier present-tense of the Romance languages) has been achieved.

The Mini-Courses have been used independently, e.g. by individual tourists without teacher. The biggest problem in such environments seems to be one of scheduling: Many adults have difficulty allocating the quarter- to half-hour per day for 11 to 20 days to complete the Mini-Course. The learning requirements are not very demanding, since the most unsophisticated learner can relate to the necessity of learning words (and special devices like mnemonics are provided to aid this process): Perhaps it is easier to plop a tape into a cassette player — but not as easy to acquire active, creative abilities from the tape.

Mini-Courses have also been taught, both independently and as Pre-Courses, by a variety of teachers, including ordinary classroom teachers, graduate and undergraduate students, etc., including both speakers and non-speakers of the language taught. An hour seems sufficient to train a willing traditional teacher. The best teacher-training seems to be study of a new foreign language through the method: A group of teachers who wanted to teach their own languages in Pre-Courses could, as a group, study a new language (without teacher) in 5 to 10 meetings of an hour each (depending on the language— an exercise that would provide useful exposure to a new language, and therefore give teachers a needed empathy for the student, as well as turn them into expert teachers of the method.

2. follow-up

How difficult is it to follow up on the initially developed speaking abilities?

Let's begin with the worst-case scenario: If the subsequent course does nothing any differently than in previous years, and the teacher is not interested in speaking abilities, then the speaking abilities may not grow beyond the Pre-Course. On the other hand, the speaking abilities do "keep" well: A semester to a year later, even in very grammar-oriented courses, students typically retain their abilities. Although not the ideal, this worst-case scenario constitutes, I suggest, a significant net gain over the traditional course.

In addition, as little as a half-hour per week seems sufficient to allow students to develop their speaking abilities. The techniques are applicable to any textbook: The teacher need only select 10-15 words (preferably within a fairly coherent topic), and pre-teach them for active use in two quarter-hour periods before ordinary study. The number of words should be kept small: An excessively large active vocabulary necessarily becomes passive.

As for full programs, I have just now reached the point in my full program in Hebrew where the structure of a full course sequence is spelled out, the materials prepared, and the main techniques tested. Parallel sections are now under development for other major languages as well.

In these follow-up sections, the specific method of the Mini-Course is followed with a section called "Focus on Situations," consisting of "Story Time" and a "Talking Dictionary." Story Time develops memory and attention-span in the foreign language by having students create original stories of some complexity, e.g. a "love triangle." The Talking Dictionary is a sequence of word-sets relevant to specific situations, starting with restaurant, shopping, etc., and working up to more and more complex situations, and abstract topics for discussion, such as

religion and politics. Given the ambitiousness of the Mini-Course, it is not surprising to be able to reach this level of complexity and abstraction within the first two semesters (although still with a smaller active vocabulary than in existing courses).

Listening and reading comprehension abilities are developed throughout the Mini-Course to a limited extent. Towards the end of the Mini-Course and into the Focus section, emphasis on comprehension with materials of less controlled vocabulary can begin in earnest.

The goal here is slightly different than in input-oriented methods: Where such methods attempt to generate acceptance of large amounts of teacher-talk, with comprehension limited to topics closely tied to the environment, our goal here is to allow learners to comprehend material of unrestricted topic in which they may not understand a significant number of words. The point here is that "exotic" languages offer so many fewer cognates that it is far more difficult to get beyond word-for-word comprehension, or even to convince students of the possibility of, and need for, such comprehension. Materials in Dutch or Spanish actually become easier as they get more advanced and realistic, because of cognates and shared cultural background; in Hebrew or Chinese, they continuously become more difficult. Thus a radical solution is needed, to allow students to comprehend globally with far less information than will allow them to feel comfortable. (Initial techniques are discussed in Bar-Lev 1984; advanced techniques are now being applied more broadly.)

In the Focus section, grammar explanations are blended in at a slightly faster pace than in the Mini-Course; broad coverage of the major structures of the languages is nevertheless possible within two semesters, although without some of the detail of traditional textbooks. Speaking grammar is sharply distinguished

from reading grammar, since the broader range of structures encountered in reading (and listening) need not be acquired actively.

Although I do not need to, I will probably continue to use a published textbook as well. One reason is that it can serve as a source of outside readings, with the exposure that they offer to a broader passive vocabulary, as well as additional grammar explanations for the interested student. I find that the time constraint of using it as a secondary textbook is exactly what is needed to use the published textbook effectively: Readings must be covered more quickly (and we often don't reach the "cute" endings of the stories), grammar explanations must be referred to more selectively. In other words, the published textbook serves, ideally, as a source for exposure to a wider range of the language, including passive vocabulary. (Nevertheless, I am still disturbed by existing textbooks, which assign the teacher the role of constantly reminding students of forgotten details, and correcting their mistakes, rather than enabling them to proceed independently.)

There is also the desirability of allowing my students to continue studying productively even if they shift to a more conventional curriculum: A traditional teacher might place an incoming student by asking whether he knows such-and-such grammatical structure. (In Hebrew, even the names and exact spelling of vowels are tricky, and Israelis have been placed in elementary courses because of their ignorance in such matters.) Even in proficiency testing, it is possible for grammatical criteria to predominate beyond their intended importance, for example for use of the past tense to be taken as criterial as opposed to speaking about past events. (I suggest that there is a certain equivocation in the very formulation of the ACTFL criteria that allows this interpretation.)

3. methodological highlights

The methodological bases of the Mini-Courses are "heretical" in several ways, even as regards definitively modern methods, such as Terrell's Natural Approach. Most notably, the Mini-Courses use 'output' (student production) as opposed to 'input' (teacher talk), going further in this regard than any of the proposals surveyed in MacLaughlin (pp.50–51), and Chaudron (esp. pp.90–99, and 190–91). In fact, students in the Mini-Courses develop fluidity on their own, to the extent that they are truly self-teaching, so that the teacher, if any, does not even have to know the language, as long as he follows the Mini-Course exactly: More input contributes to the ability to comprehend speech and interact conversationally better, but is not strictly necessary to student development of speaking. I developed the method especially for "exotic" and difficult languages, so it is not surprising that Terrell [personal communication] observed the limitations of input while trying to acquire Arabic.

I believe that raw input, especially in an inflectionally complex and/or exotic language, can be confusing and intimidating. Also, I do not wish to accustom students to "tuning out" the language, as they will do if they do not understand all that they hear (and, after all, can one make all input comprehensible to the weakest student without boring the strongest?). Further, I find natural acquisition not wholly worthy of imitation, and believe that the classroom can and must improve on it, although given a far more limited time.

Rutherford's (p.170) claim that "a grammatical syllabus need not — in fact should not — specify grammatical content" perhaps expresses the modern view, to the extent that this view is expressed at all. But any teacher is to some extent aware of the linguistic structures used in a given conversation — especially when students ignore them or have trouble with them. And just as significant, any course (at least as given at any particular time to a specific group of students)

has a grammatical sequence, no matter how it develops, and even if the teacher were unaware of it. In other words, although the anti-grammar rhetoric is sometimes fairly stark in Natural Approach and Communicative Approach, it is actually possible for the teacher or student to smuggle in a great deal of grammar, and this possibility constitutes a huge built-in equivocation in these approaches.

The problem, as I see it, is how to keep grammar in its proper place, so that student and teacher can be guided in their use of it. The Mini-Course provides a criterion for the insertability of grammar into a curriculum, and a strategy to use in confronting grammar: Students can do whatever grammar exercises are required in writing, but they know that they must speak continuously and originally, ignoring new grammar in speech, until they can do so without compromising the fluency produced by the Mini-Course. Thus, the Mini-Course provides a basis in modest fluency, and a benchmark against which the student can measure new structures, assuring at least that he always progresses and never regresses in his speaking abilities.

F. re-definition of goals

1. 'fluidity' and self-expression

In the Mini-Courses, I use the term 'fluidity' to refer to the ability to generate continuous, coherent, and creative speech, in dialogue or monologue. It is useful to substitute this term for ordinary students, since they tend to understand the term 'fluency' to include native-like quality, range, and speed: The new term helps them focus on the new goal.

I also apparently depart from Brumfit's notion of 'fluency' in disallowing mid-sentence hesitation as strictly as I do, and even disallowing various instances of 'meta-language' (comment about language) that would be allowed in ordinary

language use; for example, I disallow sentences of the type "I don't understand"; "Please repeat"; "How do you say ...?"; etc., because I have seen too much overuse of such sentences among learners. I believe that we must teach students to be more courageous, answering as well as they can with whatever they hear (which also, in any case, gives the listener feedback on how much understanding there has been). If, at first, their answers are sometimes "off the wall," they can later learn to zero in. In fact some of their "mistakes" turn out to sound quite natural — closer to ordinary conversation than the precisely matched questions and answers of even the most modern textbooks. In addition, it is important to bridge the gap between ordinary conversation and comprehension of monologue: How can students ever understand a news broadcast if they are insecure with ordinary conversational questions?

I might summarize this point by admitting that my emphasis in the Mini-Course is less on communication than on "self-expression." From the beginning, students are urged to talk: to pets, to strangers, to themselves. To be sure, practice with simple questions and answers and other interactive elements in the Mini-Course lead immediately to communicative abilities. But story-telling is characteristic of the proposed method as well: Communication, at elementary stages, is regarded as a part of self-expression, in that students are intended to enjoy the "poetry" of speaking for speaking's sake as the major element that will contribute to their ultimate ability to participate in conversations. Similarly, strategies are practiced for holding one's own with native speakers, as noted above, e.g. how to ask questions in a way to force listeners to give useful and comprehensible information: The learner cannot equal the native-speaker in language abilities, so he must equalize the situation in other ways.

There is a similarly significant shift of emphasis in other goals, as compared with existing methods and approaches. Modern methods admit the

impossibility of achieving native-like pronunciation etc., but their stance might be characterized as mostly still aiming for perfection, and simply being satisfied with imperfect success. My recommendations include not even trying for a native-like pronunciation or speed. In the first place, I feel that many students try too hard and therefore make their initial steps unnecessarily difficult, even without teacher urging. For many students phonetic detail is an unnecessary luxury, which can make their early vocabulary acquisition more difficult, and can often be acquired later with no special effort. In syntax and lexicon, too, the attempt to sound like a native is, I believe, misguided. Whether as tourist or more serious learner, one does not need the <u>most</u> natural way to say something, but only the <u>simplest adequate</u> way.

2. less authenticity

In a direct communicative respect, as well, excessively native-like quality is a detriment: The "better" students give off misleading signals about their own ability, and so regularly receive input beyond their abilities, which leads to discouragement. Students are therefore urged, in Pre-Language, to keep their phonetic accuracy in line with their communicative range, not only to keep their learning relaxed, but also to signal listeners of one's abilities. They are encouraged, initially, to use an American [r], to ignore the change of Spanish /d/ to [đ], etc. Whether correction of the particular phonetic detail is recommended immediately late in the Mini-Course or soon after (i.e. a few weeks into the semester) or later depends on the importance of the given detail in the given language, as well as the individual student's progress. In any case, the initial examples given in the Mini-Course are consistent with the general policy against

early emphasis on contrasts: Instances of difficult sounds are not avoided, but examples of contrast are avoided within the Mini-Course.

This tolerant general approach to phonetic and other details is specially encouraged in the exploratory course, particularly a special version of this course using what I call "model languages." Perhaps the clearest example of a "model language" is Serbian, taught in preference to Russian as a representative of the Slavic language family: Although less common, Serbian is easier to acquire (at least as presented in the Mini-Course); in fact it is no less useful, being substitutable on an elementary level for Russian, although far easier.

It can be recalled in this connection that the Mini-Courses do not require native or fluent speakers as teachers; in fact, they can be taught by any teacher who can follow instructions. There are even certain advantages to this novel arrangement: The teacher can truly be an empathetic facilitator, rather than an imposing authority figure, and is less likely to fall into traditional traps. While the teacher is not urged to speak with an accent or to simplify grammatically, it must be acknowledged that a non-native speaker — even one with an accent — has certain advantages for the insecure student. I do try to expose students to conversation with both non-native and native speakers, as noted, although with native speakers the difficulty is not only understanding authentic speech, but also learning to deal with any native-speaker's tendency to teach: Students must learn not to break down or discontinue speaking, or slavishly imitate every correction that a native speaker may throw out. (I disagree with the tendency, even among some excellent advanced students of foreign languages, to encourage listeners to correct them constantly, and to talk about grammar with excessive frequency. My graduates find that native-speaker teachers do tend to correct errors, but ordinary people do not.)

3. optimal errors

I further propose that the curriculum designer should attend to probable errors, with the goal of ensuring that all errors are 'optimal' in the sense of being minimally confusing, minimally offensive, and a minimal hindrance to fuller acquisition later.

This idea has turned out to be one of the most interesting aspects of curriculum design in the Mini-Courses. It represents an apparently new kind of constraint on curriculum design: the curriculum designer taking responsibility for what students actually acquire, and not only for what the teacher teaches; taking responsibility for actual student speech, not only of "A" students, but of "B" and "C" students as well.

For example, which form of given words should be taught as the sole initial form in the Pre-Language stage, given the reasonable assumption that some students will persist in using this form alone even after other forms have been taught? In the Mini-Courses of most languages, the 3rd-person singular is preferred as the sole initial form since it is most neutral, and therefore least confusing: ***Yo está*** is less confusing than ***Él estóy*** (the latter is a likely error in both traditional and natural-acquisition contexts because of the primacy of the 'I'-form in both traditional paradigms and ordinary conversation). The infinitive, although slightly more neutral, is not as good a choice, since it is less often correct in ordinary sentences, and thus presents more of a barrier to future acquisition: The beginner who says ***yo hablar*** faces a larger barrier in shifting to **yo hablo** than one who says ***yo habla***.

If we attend to the results expectable for students who do not acquire all the grammatical detail, we must admit that the language taught in any of the Mini-Courses is in certain respects a special "dialect," purposely adapted to the abilities of learners. I have sometimes used the term 'designer language' (on the

analogy of 'designer jeans') to describe this curricular strategy. Of course, any textbook or course defines its own 'designer dialect' in this sense. For example, I recall a textbook of Russian that began with the past tense for initial ease: Even the better students continued to use the past instead of the present in this (badly designed) 'designer Russian.'

As an example of the more purposeful designer characteristics of Mini-Courses, I might mention that Hebrew **et** (somewhat parallel to Spanish animate **a**) is deferred to beyond the Mini-Course altogether, although obligatory in Modern Hebrew, because of the errors that early introduction has been found to cause. Spanish **a**, because of its partial overlap with 'at/to' in **mirar/escuchar a quién**, is easier and less dangerous to teach, although it too is regarded as optional in 'designer Spanish.'

To take a more controversial example, while the genders of German (or Greek or Russian) can be acquired with some success by many students, the case-endings (the several forms of nouns, articles, and adjectives, used in different functions in the sentence) cannot be <u>acquired</u> within a year or more of study at an ordinary pace; while some students learn to translate in writing, many students report only sporadic command of the system after many years of study, including residence in the foreign country. For them (as for students in the Transition stage of the Mini-Courses!), the choice is between allowing mistakes in the range of 50%, or interrupting mid-sentence to self-correct.

It is pointless if not impossible (I believe) to defer speaking until a high degree of accuracy with case-endings has been achieved (which for many students would mean forever); and teaching speaking in class is important, even if complete accuracy is not possible. Indeed, if <u>accuracy</u> in these structures cannot be required in a year or much more, why not nevertheless require <u>speaking</u> from the very beginning, as I do in the Mini-Course?

Samples of the most important case-forms are given in the Mini-Courses, to aid comprehension. And I could be coy (as I believe some modern methodologists are) and claim that I simply want to encourage fluidity — which is indeed the case: The Mini-Courses contain specific reminders for students and teachers that fluidity should not be sacrificed to any grammatical category. But a great deal of attention has been paid, in designing the Mini-Courses, to the question of which specific grammatical categories are more important than others for initial acquisition, and the implication of the resulting presentation is certainly that case-forms are far less important for these languages than, for example, present-tense conjugational forms, or even gender forms. If I did not overtly recommend speaking without case-forms, many students would choose to stumble on this snag in the language. And, more specifically, I believe that it is valuable to continue teaching gender even while deferring case, which is the very opposite of attempting to teach or even present the whole system at once.

In these terms, German a case-error ***Er lernt in die Schule*** is a better early error, for acquisition purposes, than a gender-error ***Er lernt in dem Schule,*** although perhaps sometimes not as good for communicative purposes alone, e.g. with **rennen**. Of course optimal errors are not guaranteed in natural acquisition: Errors of case and gender such as ***dem Schule ist gross** would be just as likely as any other error in natural acquisition, and many adult acquirers simply never learn the system in general, partly because of lack of time, and partly, I suggest, because the system is never sorted out with sufficient clarity for them to acquire it.

4. speaking and grammar goals

The 'designer' variety of a language is admittedly a special dialect, but, I suggest, a more acceptable variety of the language (and one that will better lead to subsequent proficiency) than is likely to result either from the ordinary classroom or from natural acquisition. And, as noted, any textbook defines a 'designer dialect,' albeit implicitly. We could even regard mid-sentence calculations, vacillations, hesitations, and English insertions as discourse features of the 'designer dialect' of grammar-oriented textbooks.

It is assumed, let us recall, that hesitations, pauses, etc., are banished in the Mini-Courses. A traditional classroom might value **"Él estár, estóy, estás, está (that's right:) Él está feliz"** as an "A" utterance, and **"Yo está feliz"** as a "C." In the Mini-Courses, the first is a "D" because of its vacillations and insertions, the latter a "B": an "A" would require a longer, more imaginative utterance. Grammatical detail would distinguish a minus from a plus, but the letter-grade itself is determined by content.

This policy for conversation should not interfere with policies that require the ability to do grammar exercises, even with case-endings. I suggest accepting these grammar policies not because they are necessarily useful or correct, but simply because they are an inevitable curricular reality in most programs and textbooks. The goal of the Mini-Courses is not to eradicate grammar policies, but to allow the acquisition, preservation, and development of speaking skills, in spite of the inevitably negative effects of the grammar policies. A completely comfortable resolution may not be possible at present, and perhaps is not even desirable: If speaking is a desirable goal (as most students believe it is), then it deserves some commitment to it, even if this commitment causes a certain discomfort.

G. summary

The Mini-Courses, as noted, can be used as Pre-Courses in regular academic study. They do not combine with regular textbooks, but rather precede them and provide independent skills: A regular textbook can be used to provide reading materials, additional (passive) vocabulary, and whatever grammar knowledge is necessary to satisfy external curricular demands, accompanied by the suggested follow-up. The regular textbook should be covered in less time, since almost all the vocabulary and grammar of the Mini-Course is invariably included in the regular textbook, so that the Pre-Course really only pre-teaches a special selection of the whole course with heavy emphasis on producing spontaneous, active command, which is generally absent from elementary courses.

The ideal follow-up is a sequence of activities that I call, in its present version (written only for 2-3 languages), 'Focus on Situations,' consisting of 'Story Time' and the 'Talking Dictionary,' as described above. While this section is currently still to be written or is under major revision for the main languages in the program, I have taught with it enough to have a fairly clear idea of the number and type of words that can be taught within the time limits; more specifically, I have seen that 'Focus on Situations' allows students to follow up on the Mini-Course adequately, maintaining and expanding their speaking abilities subsequently, within a mere half-hour or so per week.

Many of the students who make it through two or more years of grammar simply never graduate to speaking, at least in more exotic languages. In contrast to Higgs, I suggest that <u>early grammar is often the very reason</u> that speaking is subsequently impossible: Some students are simply unable to absorb all the grammar into their speech, and would have had to acquire speech when they knew far less grammar. Speaking, as I have been suggesting, properly belongs at the very beginning of study.

In any case, the insertion of a two- or three-week special unit at the beginning of a traditional course is not a large investment of time, especially if it offers the chance at providing speaking abilities that may otherwise be unattainable. The Mini-Courses are therefore a flexible and portable solution to problems that range from curriculum to administration, which I suggest militate strongly against the successful teaching of spontaneous speaking in many teaching environments.

In programs that insist that they do not have the time for a Mini-Course, the Pre-Language stage alone — teachable in a week or less — also makes sense. For example, in courses that truly focus on reading, there can be no serious objection to devoting a few classroom hours to provide very limited but also very easy speaking that would, if nothing else, require a small active core of knowledge: The greater time and effort required for the 'Transition' stage is unnecessary since active spontaneous grammar knowledge is not actually required in these courses.

The Mini-Courses are not a magic solution to all problems of foreign language study, but they do seem to offer an interestingly powerful solution to one important set of problems: how to achieve speaking abilities within existing frameworks, and within limited time generally. I do not believe in teaching a whole language in 10 (or 100, or 1000) hours, but simply in returning 10 hours worth of language abilities for 10 hours of study, rather than forcing down elements of language that are known not to reach critical mass until years later.

It is my belief (based on conversations with hundreds of students, as well as a few surveys) that students overwhelmingly are interested in speaking, and that, with few exceptions, their needs are not being met and are not likely to be met within existing frameworks: Reinert's observations seem remarkably accurate two decades after they were written. The possibility of achieving speaking goals within a few weeks, albeit on a highly limited scale — and then of

being able to support these developments with a weekly 'booster' of just a half-hour — would seem to recommend itself to a broad audience of teachers.

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